

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY**

ABDUL-JABBAR WEBSTER,	:	
	:	Civil Action No. 13-2906 (ES)
Plaintiff,	:	
	:	
v.	:	OPINION
	:	
JOHN T. BOOTH,	:	
	:	
Defendant.	:	

SALAS, District Judge

Plaintiff Abdul-Jabbar Webster (“Plaintiff”), a state prisoner incarcerated at Southern State Correctional Facility in Delmont, New Jersey at the time of filing, seeks to bring this action *in forma pauperis*. Based on his affidavit of indigence, the Court will grant Plaintiff’s application to proceed *in forma pauperis* pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a) and order the Clerk of the Court to file the complaint.

At this time, the Court must review the complaint, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A, to determine whether it should be dismissed as frivolous or malicious, for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or because it seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. For the reasons set forth below, the Court concludes that the complaint should be dismissed.

I. BACKGROUND

Plaintiff brings this civil rights action, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, against Defendant John T. Booth. The following factual allegations are taken from the complaint, and are accepted

for purposes of this screening only. The Court has made no findings as to the veracity of Plaintiff's allegations.

Plaintiff alleges that John T. Booth, "counsel for the Public Defenders Office," refused to subpoena Plaintiff's witnesses and refused to submit Plaintiff's witnesses' "signed notary's" into evidence. (D.E. No. 1, Compl. ¶¶ 4(b), 6.) Plaintiff further alleges that Defendant Booth refused to "subpoena the video's from hospital and H.C.C.C to prove that [Plaintiff] didn't have a pocket on [his] shirt." (*Id.* at ¶ 6) Plaintiff also alleges that Defendant Booth refused to give Plaintiff copies of his discovery and the grand jury transcripts. (*Id.*) Plaintiff does not request any specific relief.

II. DISCUSSION

A. Legal Standard

1. Standards for a *Sua Sponte* Dismissal

Per the Prison Litigation Reform Act, Pub. L. No. 104-134, §§ 801-810, 110 Stat. 1321-66 to 1321-77 (April 26, 1996) ("PLRA"), district courts must review complaints in those civil actions in which a prisoner is proceeding *in forma pauperis*, *see* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), seeks redress against a governmental employee or entity, *see* 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b), or brings a claim with respect to prison conditions, *see* 28 U.S.C. § 1997e. The PLRA directs district courts to *sua sponte* dismiss any claim that is frivolous, is malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. This action is subject to *sua sponte* screening for dismissal under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A because Plaintiff is proceeding as an indigent and is a prisoner.

According to the Supreme Court's decision in *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, "a pleading that offers 'labels or conclusions' or 'a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action will not do.'" 2

556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (quoting *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007)). To survive *sua sponte* screening for failure to state a claim,¹ the complaint must allege “sufficient factual matter” to show that the claim is facially plausible. *Fowler v. UPMS Shadyside*, 578 F.3d 203, 210 (3d Cir. 2009) (citation omitted). “A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Belmont v. MB Inv. Partners, Inc.*, 708 F.3d 470, 483 n.17 (3d Cir. 2012) (quoting *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678). Moreover, while *pro se* pleadings are liberally construed, “*pro se* litigants still must allege sufficient facts in their complaints to support a claim.” *Mala v. Crown Bay Marina, Inc.*, 704 F.3d 239, 245 (3d Cir. 2013) (citation omitted) (emphasis added).

2. Section 1983 Actions

A plaintiff may have a cause of action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 for certain violations of his constitutional rights. Section 1983 provides in relevant part:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory ... subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress

Thus, to state a claim for relief under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege, first, the violation of a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States and, second, that the alleged deprivation was committed or caused by a person acting under color of state law. *See West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S.

¹ “The legal standard for dismissing a complaint for failure to state a claim pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) is the same as that for dismissing a complaint pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6).” *Schreane v. Seana*, 506 F. App’x 120, 122 (3d Cir. 2012) (citing *Allah v. Seiverling*, 229 F.3d 220, 223 (3d Cir. 2000)); *Mitchell v. Beard*, 492 F. App’x 230, 232 (3d Cir. 2012) (discussing 28 U.S.C. § 1997e(c)(1)); *Courteau v. United States*, 287 F. App’x 159, 162 (3d Cir. 2008) (discussing 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b)).

42, 48 (1988); *Malleus v. George*, 641 F.3d 560, 563 (3d Cir. 2011).

B. Analysis

In *Polk Co. v. Dodson*, 454 U.S. 312, 325 (1981), the Supreme Court held that a public defender, although paid and ultimately supervised by the state, “does not act under color of state law when performing the traditional functions of counsel to a criminal defendant.” *See also Vermont v. Brillon*, 556 U.S. 81, 91 (2009) (“Unlike a prosecutor or the court, assigned counsel ordinarily is not considered a state actor); *Angelico v. Lehigh Valley Hosp., Inc.*, 184 F.3d 268, 277 (3d Cir. 1999) (private attorneys were not acting under color of state law when they issued subpoenas); *Gause v. Haile*, No. 13-3628, 2014 WL 1099260, at *2 (3d Cir. Mar. 21, 2014) (public defender representing criminal defendant is not acting under color of state law).

Therefore, because it appears that Defendant Booth was not acting under color of state law in representing Plaintiff, the Complaint must be dismissed. While a District Court generally grants leave to correct the deficiencies in a complaint by amendment, in this case, leave will not be granted because amendment would be futile. *See DelRio-Mocci v. Connolly Properties Inc.*, 672 F.3d 241, 251 (3d Cir. 2012); *Shane v. Fauver*, 213 F.3d 113, 115 (3d Cir. 2000).

III. CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth above, the Complaint will be dismissed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and 1915A(b)(1). It is not conceivable that Plaintiff could cure the defects in this Complaint by amendment. An appropriate order follows.

Dated:

s/ Esther Salas
Esther Salas, U.S.D.J.